

## Student Perceptions: TikTok's vs. Movies' Role in Vocabulary Acquisition

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### A B S T R A C T

Vocabulary is a fundamental component in English language learning, yet many students still struggle to enrich their vocabulary due to limited contextual learning in formal instruction. With the rise of digital platforms, TikTok and movies have become popular sources of authentic language input, though their effectiveness has rarely been compared directly. This study investigates students' perceptions of TikTok and movies in vocabulary acquisition. Employing a qualitative case study, data were collected from 25 eleventh-grade students at MAN 1 Kabupaten Semarang through questionnaires combining Likert-scale items and open-ended questions. Findings reveal that while TikTok offers short, engaging, and easily accessible content, its effectiveness is often hindered by distractions and lack of contextual depth. In contrast, movies provide richer vocabulary exposure, contextualized usage, and higher retention, leading students to perceive them as more effective for vocabulary learning. The study concludes that movies serve as a more reliable medium for enhancing vocabulary acquisition.

**Keywords:** *Vocabulary Acquisition, Tiktok, Movies, Student Perceptions*

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## INTRODUCTION

English language proficiency is essential in the era of globalization. As a major international language, English is widely used in education, science, business and global communication. Among the important components of English language acquisition, vocabulary plays an important role. It is the foundation that supports the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills (Lee et al. 2022). According to Teng (2023), a strong vocabulary helps students comprehend texts, construct sentences correctly, and engage in effective communication. Students with extensive vocabulary knowledge are more likely to succeed in mastering English as a foreign language (Regina & Rajasekaran, 2024).

However, the reality is that many students still experience difficulties in enriching their vocabulary (Mashrabovna & Kizi, 2023), which ultimately affects their overall ability in English. Formal teaching in schools provides systematic and contextualized vocabulary learning through active use and varied exposure. However, in practice, teaching often still focuses on mechanical memorization, limited context and textbook-based instruction. The mismatch between what is expected and actual practice leads to limited vocabulary growth, thus negatively affecting students' overall proficiency.

The digital age, however, has introduced new opportunities for incidental language learning beyond the classroom. Students now regularly interact with media that were not originally designed for educational purposes but can support language acquisition through authentic exposure. Among these, TikTok and movies are two of the most frequently accessed platforms by students. Both offer abundant English input, although in very different formats.

TikTok is a short video platform characterized by short-form, visually rich, and often informal content. Its broad appeal among students is because of its entertainment value, short-form content, and personalization features. Research by Hutasoit et al. (2025) shows that students view TikTok as a fun and engaging tool for vocabulary development, especially because of its multimedia features and exposure to real-life language use. Alshreef & Khadawardi (2023) support this by noting that the audio-visual elements of TikTok help with vocabulary retention. Alharthy (2025) adds that TikTok fosters familiarity with idioms, expressions, and pronunciation through repeated and contextual exposure.

On the other hand, movies have long been recognized as a valuable resource in language learning. Movies combine dialog, visuals, and narrative structure, providing rich linguistic and cultural input in context. Research by Hassan et al. (2020) demonstrates that movies support vocabulary learning through exposure to authentic language in realistic settings. Subtitles, plot development, and character interaction allow learners to infer meanings and deepen their understanding of word usage. Sari & Aminatun (2021) further emphasize that students benefit from seeing vocabulary applied in everyday situations, aided by visual context and subtitle support. Movies also help learners internalize pronunciation and intonation, particularly when the audio and visuals are synchronized.

Although TikTok and movies have been studied in relation to English vocabulary acquisition, most existing research tends to examine the two separately. Research has generally focused on how TikTok contributes to incidental learning or how movies support structured language exposure, without offering a direct comparison between the two. This creates a gap in the literature: how do students themselves perceive the effectiveness of these two commonly used media for vocabulary learning? Each media has different strengths-TikTok is short, informal and interactive, while movies are longer, contextualized and structured. Understanding which aspects students find more helpful may provide practical insights into how educators can integrate these media into classroom learning or self-directed learning.

The process of vocabulary learning itself is multifaceted. According to Nation (2001), vocabulary knowledge consists of knowledge of word form (pronunciation, spelling), meaning (concepts, referents), and use (collocations, grammatical functions). Schmitt (2010) further distinguish between vocabulary breadth – the number of words a learner knows – and depth – the degree to which the learner understands and can use each word. Hatch and Brown (1995) identify five stages in vocabulary learning: encountering new words, getting the word form, understanding meaning, consolidating form and meaning in memory, and using the word productively. These stages can be supported by different types of input, especially digital media.

TikTok supports the early stages of vocabulary learning through exposure and frequent repetition in an entertaining format. Short videos can highlight key vocabulary and allow students to mimic pronunciation or usage. Shanthi et al. (2025) and Jamisolamin et al. (2025) note that TikTok is particularly useful for high-vocabulary and idiomatic expressions, offering a low-pressure environment for repeated practice. Its highly visual and interactive design appeals to students with shorter attention spans, and its algorithms can customize content based on student interests, increasing motivation.

Movies, on the other hand, support a deeper stage of vocabulary acquisition. Movies provide repeated exposure within a meaningful and cohesive narrative context. Students engage with new vocabulary through character interaction, plot development, and audiovisual cues. This supports not only memory retention but also comprehension and usage. Studies by Goctu (2017) emphasize that films allow learners to associate language with real-life situations, tone, and emotion, making the learning experience more memorable and authentic.

This research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how digital media supports vocabulary acquisition by examining students' personal experiences of TikTok and movies. Most previous research has investigated the use of TikTok or movies separately as tools for English vocabulary learning. Research on TikTok generally highlights its engaging format, short video structure, and incidental learning potential, while research on movies emphasizes

rich contextual input, authentic dialogue, and long-term vocabulary retention. However, these studies tend to examine each media separately, without providing a comparative perspective on how students perceive the effectiveness of both platforms in vocabulary acquisition.

Therefore, this study aims to fill those gaps by investigating students' perceptions of TikTok and movies in English vocabulary acquisition and identifying the factors that make each media more or less effective in the learning process. By focusing on students' subjective experiences, this research seeks to explore how informal digital platforms can support formal language learning. This study aims to answer the following research questions: (1) Which platform do students find more interesting and helpful for learning new English vocabulary – TikTok or movies? (2) What are the students' reasons for preferring one media over the other?

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore students' perceptions of using TikTok and movies as media to enhance English vocabulary acquisition. A qualitative approach is suitable for capturing students' experiences and subjective viewpoints in-depth. Rather than relying on numerical data, this approach collects descriptive responses to uncover how and why students perceive these platforms as effective for vocabulary learning. This case study design provides a contextualized understanding of informal digital media in second language acquisition.

The research was conducted at MAN 1 Kabupaten Semarang, specifically targeting eleventh-grade students. A total of twenty-five students participated in the study. These students were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on those who had prior experience using both TikTok and movies for learning English. The selection ensured that participants were familiar with both platforms, which was essential for drawing valid comparisons between the two.

Data in this study were collected using a mixed-method questionnaire, incorporating both closed-ended questions measured on a 5-point Likert scale and open-ended questions. This design allowed for the collection of both quantitative data on the frequency and intensity of students' perceptions and qualitative data that captured detailed experiences and reasoning in the participants' own words. The questionnaire was specifically designed to explore and compare students' perceptions of the effectiveness of TikTok and movies as media for learning English vocabulary.

The questionnaire was distributed to students in digital form. Prior to distribution, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and provided clear written and verbal instructions on how to complete both sections. For the Likert scale section, students were asked to rate their agreement with various statements based on their personal experiences. For the open-ended section, they were encouraged to provide elaborate explanations, examples, and personal anecdotes. Students completed the questionnaire independently without time pressure, allowing for thoughtful reflection.

For data analysis, a mixed-method approach was employed. Quantitative data from the Likert scale were analyzed statistically to identify general trends and central tendencies in perceptions. Qualitative data from the open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. This process involved identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The analysis followed a structured process: data condensation (selecting, simplifying, and summarizing the qualitative data), data display (organizing the findings from both data types to address the research problems), and drawing and verifying conclusions (interpreting the patterns from the integrated quantitative and qualitative data).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Preferred Media for Learning Vocabulary

It is important to know learners' preferences regarding media for vocabulary learning. Table 1 shows the results of students' preferences regarding media, namely TikTok and movies.

*Student Perceptions: TikTok's vs. Movies' Role in Vocabulary Acquisition*

No	Questions	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	SD (%)	D (%)	Total (%)
1	I prefer to learn English vocabulary through TikTok.	8%	60%	24%	4%	4%	100%
2	I prefer to learn English vocabulary through Movies.	28%	56%	12%	4%	0	100%

Based on the above results, it can be seen that the majority of students chose movies as a medium for vocabulary learning, with a result of 84%, because they are considered to provide diverse vocabulary and can present it in real-life contexts, making it easier for students to understand and remember. Exposure to various language situations can deepen one's understanding of the language and improve overall linguistic proficiency (Maulida & Warni, 2024). The context in which vocabulary is used in these movies greatly helps students to understand vocabulary and its use according to their needs.

In addition to enhancing vocabulary retention, watching movies also fosters crucial listening and comprehension skills among students (Pavithra & Gandhimathi, 2024). As they engage with dialogue and narrative, students are exposed to authentic speaking patterns, idiomatic expressions, and varied accents (Alharthy, 2025), which can significantly enrich their linguistic capabilities. This multi-sensory approach to language learning makes the process enjoyable and encourages active participation, as students often find themselves discussing film plots, characters, and themes. Such discussions provide meaningful interaction, allowing learners to practice speaking and apply new vocabulary collaboratively (Lee et al., 2022). Furthermore, the emotional engagement that movies often evoke can create a memorable learning experience, making it easier for students to connect with the language personally, ultimately enhancing their motivation and commitment to mastering new vocabulary (Alshreef & Khadawardi, 2023). This is strengthened by the opinions of the students, which are:

*Movies use a wider range of vocabulary than TikTok. In addition, TikTok focuses more on trending topics, so vocabulary addition is limited to things that have recently gone viral. For movies, the vocabulary used can vary depending on the genre we watch.*

*(Respondent 23)*

*Movies are good because we can see a broader context for the use of vocabulary.*

*(Respondent 16)*

*Movies, because it is easier to understand the context of the conversation.*

*(Respondent 21)*

Based on the above results, students chose movies as a medium for vocabulary learning because the vocabulary they acquired was broader and more varied depending on the genre they were watching. The results are supported by previous research by Kaboocha (2016), which states that students agree that movies can help them improve their vocabulary acquisition because movies present a lot of information from various types of vocabulary and even expressions. Other students emphasized that learning vocabulary through movies also allows them to see the context of words and how they are used depending on the situation. In the same research results, Kaboocha (2016) also stated in his findings that movies are an effective method for vocabulary learning because they present vocabulary that is easy to understand by seeing the context in which the vocabulary is used directly. Students also mention that learning vocabulary through their preferred movie genres makes studying more enjoyable, as it aligns with their personal interests. Research by Pavithra & Gandhimathi (2024) found that students' personal preferences in movie genres were important for motivating them and making language learning more enjoyable. Not only does this support the students' opinion, but it also affirms that genre is just as important in vocabulary learning.

### **Effectiveness in Remembering and Understanding New Vocabulary**

This questionnaire explores the effectiveness of media in helping students remember and understand new vocabulary. The results, which are shown in Table 2, will show which media are most effective for vocabulary learning.

No	Questions	SA	A	N	SD	D	Total
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		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
3	TikTok helps me remember and understand how to use new vocabulary.	11%	12%	36%	4%	4%	100%
4	Movies help me remember and understand how to use new vocabulary.	28%	60%	8%	4%	0	100%

Based on the above results, most students chose movies, with 88% indicating that they were the most effective medium to help remember and understand vocabulary. Regarding this finding, this study's results align with Ashcroft et al. (2018) findings, which show that watching full-length movies can result in an incidental increase in vocabulary, with a mean gain of 1.77 words per student (4.2%) in his study. In other words, as also shown in this study, movies are not only interesting in terms of content, but also effective in helping students understand and remember new vocabulary through authentic story contexts.

By exposing students to authentic language within captivating narratives, movies not only facilitate comprehension of new words and phrases (Ashcroft et al., 2018) but also foster a deeper emotional connection to the language. Therefore, integrating films into language instruction not only enriches the educational experience (Goctu, 2017) but also promotes more effective learning outcomes. This is strengthened by the opinions of the students, which are:

*In my opinion, movies make it easier for me to remember and understand new vocabulary because it is presented in the context of a story, expressions, and clear situations.*

(Respondent 6)

*Movies, because the vocabulary used is everyday language*

(Respondent 16)

The results above show that students find it easier to remember and understand vocabulary when the learning media presents a clear and realistic context. Previous research supports the effectiveness of contextual learning in vocabulary acquisition. Van den Broek et al. (2018) demonstrated that contextual richness enhances comprehension by providing learners with distinct contextual details that can later be used to recall word meaning. In this case, movies are considered to provide examples of vocabulary usage through everyday conversations, facial expressions, intonation, and storylines that resemble real-life situations. With such a context, students can associate new vocabulary directly with the situations in which it is used, making the process of storage and recall more effective. Studies by Jones et al. (2021). have shown that words encountered in different contexts are learned more effectively than those presented in the same context It means that movies introduce new vocabulary and help students build meaningful connections between words and their concrete uses in real communication.

### Factors of Ease and Comfort in Learning Vocabulary

This questionnaire explores which media provide ease and comfort in learning vocabulary. The questionnaire results in Table 3 will show which media are most suitable for this purpose.

No	Questions	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	SD (%)	D (%)	Total (%)
5	I chose TikTok because its short videos make learning easier.	28%	48%	16%	8%	0	100%
6	I chose movies because the dialogue and storyline help me understand vocabulary.	24%	60%	8%	8%	0	100%

Based on the results above, most students chose movies with a result of 84% as the medium that provides ease and comfort in learning vocabulary. Movies provide a more authentic learning experience and align with the context of word usage. Previous research by Roslim et al. (2021) has shown that language learners believe movies are authentic sources of language learning and can be used effectively to improve language skills including speaking, listening, reading, vocabulary, and writing. Movies are considered to provide entertainment and help students understand the meaning and usage of vocabulary more deeply through

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realistic storylines, expressions, and communication situations. This is strengthened by the opinions of the students, which are:

*In my opinion, movies make it easier for me to understand new vocabulary because they are presented in the context of stories, expressions, and clear situations, making them easier to understand.*

(Respondent 24)

*Movies, because I can learn more details about using words in real-life situations.*

(Respondent 21)

Based on the above results, students chose movies as a medium that provides ease and comfort in learning because movies present clear story contexts, expressions, and situations. Other students also stated that movies make it easier to learn vocabulary because they can learn more details about vocabulary that can be applied in real situations. Previous findings also support the results of these statements. In his research, Srinivas Rao (2019) stated that movies provide students with a visual context that can be visualized with real-life situations. In his research, Srinivas Rao (2019) also found that movies provide an experience to understand the use of facial expressions and gestures, which makes it easier for students to apply the vocabulary they have learned to real-life situations, according to the context.

Unlike movies, some students also acknowledged that TikTok has its advantages, especially in terms of its short duration and to-the-point presentation of material, making it feel lighter and easier to follow. It makes some students feel that TikTok can be an effective alternative when study time is limited. However, other students noted that using TikTok for vocabulary learning is less effective due to excessive distractions and the wide variety of content, causing learned material to be easily forgotten. Van den Broek et al. (2018) stated that the fast-paced content on TikTok can shorten attention span, cause distraction, and lead to task switching, which when extended to academic work, results in diminished ability to focus on tasks requiring extended attention. The opinions of students support this:

*TikTok, because it is short and to the point.*

(Respondent 18)

*In my opinion, TikTok is mostly distracting, and the diverse content makes it easy to forget, so I prefer movies.*

(Respondent 25)

These findings indicate that TikTok can aid students in learning new words (Alghameeti, 2022), but its effectiveness depends on several factors. Students need to stay focused when using the app and choose videos that are truly helpful for learning vocabulary. If they get distracted or watch unrelated content, they may not benefit as much (Yang et al., 2025), as the platform's fast-paced content can lead to shortened attention spans and reduced ability to sustain focus during tasks requiring prolonged concentration (Zhang & Wang, 2024). In the end, how well students learn vocabulary with TikTok depends not just on the platform, but also on how carefully they select and pay attention to learning materials.

### **Motivation and Interest in Learning Vocabulary**

This questionnaire explores motivation and interest in learning vocabulary through TikTok and movies. The results in Table 4 will show which media are most suitable for this purpose.

No	Questions	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	SD (%)	D (%)	Total (%)
7	I feel more interested and motivated to learn vocabulary when using TikTok.	12%	44%	36%	4%	4%	100%
8	I feel more interested and motivated to learn vocabulary when using movies.	8%	56%	24%	8%	4%	100%

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Based on the above results, most students chose movies, with a result of 64%, which reveals that students are more motivated and interested in learning vocabulary using movies (Hong et al., 2023) because the learning process is more enjoyable and not monotonous. Movies allow students to learn while enjoying the storyline (Albiladi et al., 2018), fostering an interest in language material that naturally arises in conversation.

Movies give students the chance to hear how language is actually used in everyday life, which makes learning vocabulary feel more meaningful and practical. Instead of memorizing lists of words or reading dialogues that sometimes feel unnatural, students get to see how people really talk, complete with expressions, slang, and cultural references. By watching characters use language in different situations, students can link new words to emotions, actions, and contexts, making the vocabulary easier to recall and use in real conversations (Bostanci, 2022). This way, learning through movies is not only more engaging, but it also helps students build stronger and longer-lasting vocabulary skills. This is strengthened by the opinions of the students, which are:

*I am motivated to choose movies because I can learn while enjoying the story, so it's not boring.*

(Respondent 13)

*Because I like watching movies and want to improve my English, I try to learn the language with the help of movies.*

(Respondent 22)

Based on the above results, students feel motivated and interested in learning vocabulary through movies because the process allows them to combine education with entertainment. By being able to learn new words while following an engaging storyline, students are less likely to lose interest or become bored, making the learning experience more enjoyable and sustainable over time. Hong et al. (2023) stated that show that learning through movies makes students more enthusiastic than traditional methods. Additionally, one student shared that they specifically choose movies as a medium for improving their English proficiency, as this method not only helps them expand their vocabulary but also supports their personal interests and enjoyment of movies. These findings highlight that learning vocabulary through movies is not only effective, but also fun and engaging for students, which can lead to greater motivation and better learning outcomes. Alolaywi (2023) stated in his research that movies can increase motivation to learn and reduce anxiety related to presentations. Other studies also discuss the motivation of movies for their use in vocabulary learning.

### The Barriers of Learning Vocabulary

This questionnaire explores the obstacles faced in learning vocabulary through TikTok and movies. The questionnaire results in Table 5 will show which media are most suitable for this purpose.

No	Questions	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	SD (%)	D (%)	Total (%)
9	I often get distracted by other content when learning vocabulary through TikTok.	48%	16%	24%	12%	0	100%
10	The long duration of the movies made it difficult for me to focus on learning English vocabulary.	20%	36%	36%	8%	0	100%

Based on the results above, 74% of students reported encountering obstacles when using TikTok for vocabulary learning. This indicates that while TikTok is widely used, a significant majority of students face challenges that hinder its effectiveness for this purpose. Students explained that TikTok's fast-paced, entertainment-focused platform often leads to distraction, making it difficult for them to remain focused on learning new vocabulary (Essoe et al. 2022). Additionally, they noted that the lack of clear and consistent context in many TikTok videos makes it hard to understand how vocabulary should be used in real-life situations. These findings are further supported by direct student opinions, which are:

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*The obstacle is usually related to the number of distractions from other videos compared to finding the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary.*

*(Respondent 23)*

*I have tried learning English vocabulary through TikTok, but it is ineffective. The videos are too short, the explanations are often rushed, and sometimes there is no context for the words used in sentences. It makes it difficult for me to understand and remember the vocabulary well.*

*(Respondent 24)*

Based on the results above, students have not fully utilized TikTok as a medium for learning vocabulary due to several obstacles they face while using it. The main reason is that many variations of videos and algorithms display different content, causing students to be easily distracted and not focused on their learning objectives. Hollyland (2024) confirms that TikTok's algorithms designed to keep users on the platform result in short memory span, reduced attention, and weak cognitive development. Additionally, the short duration of the videos makes vocabulary explanations rushed and fails to provide sufficient examples of usage in sentences. As a result, this makes it difficult to truly understand the meaning of the vocabulary or remember it over a longer period of time.

Unlike TikTok, which tends to present distractions through its variety of content, the use of movies as a learning medium also presents its own set of challenges. Several students revealed that the extended duration of movies can actually diminish their learning focus (Pavithra & Gandhimathi, 2024). Sitting through an entire movie for the purpose of learning vocabulary may lead to fatigue or boredom, especially if the movie is not engaging throughout. This prolonged exposure can make it difficult for students to maintain concentration on the educational aspects (Kalra, 2017), potentially reducing the effectiveness of vocabulary acquisition. Some students even mentioned that breaking the movie into shorter segments or focusing on specific scenes might help maintain their interest and enhance the learning experience. It can be seen from the following statement:

*Duration is significantly affected; if it is long, it becomes boring quickly, but you can learn a lot of vocabulary.*

*(Respondent 25)*

Thus, although both movies and TikTok have potential as learning, movies tend to be more effective and reliable in supporting vocabulary comprehension. This is primarily due to the clear and consistent context provided by movies (Alharthy, 2025), which allows students to observe vocabulary being used naturally within meaningful conversations and storylines (Ashcroft et al., 2018). The narrative structure and visual cues in movies help learners understand how words and phrases are applied in real-life situations, making it easier for them to remember and use new vocabulary appropriately. In contrast, TikTok's fast-paced and diverse content can make it harder for students to maintain focus on language learning. The platform often presents fragmented or out-of-context language, which may lead to confusion or superficial understanding. As a result, students using TikTok for vocabulary acquisition must exercise greater self-discipline to filter relevant content and avoid distractions, making the learning process more challenging compared to the structured environment that movies provide.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that movies are perceived as a more effective medium for English vocabulary learning compared to TikTok. The contextual use of vocabulary in movies—through dialogues, storylines, and real-life communication settings—helps students better understand, remember, and apply new words. Movies also enhance motivation and engagement, making the learning process more meaningful and enjoyable. On the other hand, TikTok offers benefits such as brevity and accessibility, but its effectiveness is limited by distractions, lack of context, and superficial exposure to vocabulary. Therefore, while TikTok may serve as a supplementary tool for incidental learning, movies remain a more reliable and

pedagogically valuable medium for developing students' vocabulary in a structured and sustainable way.

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